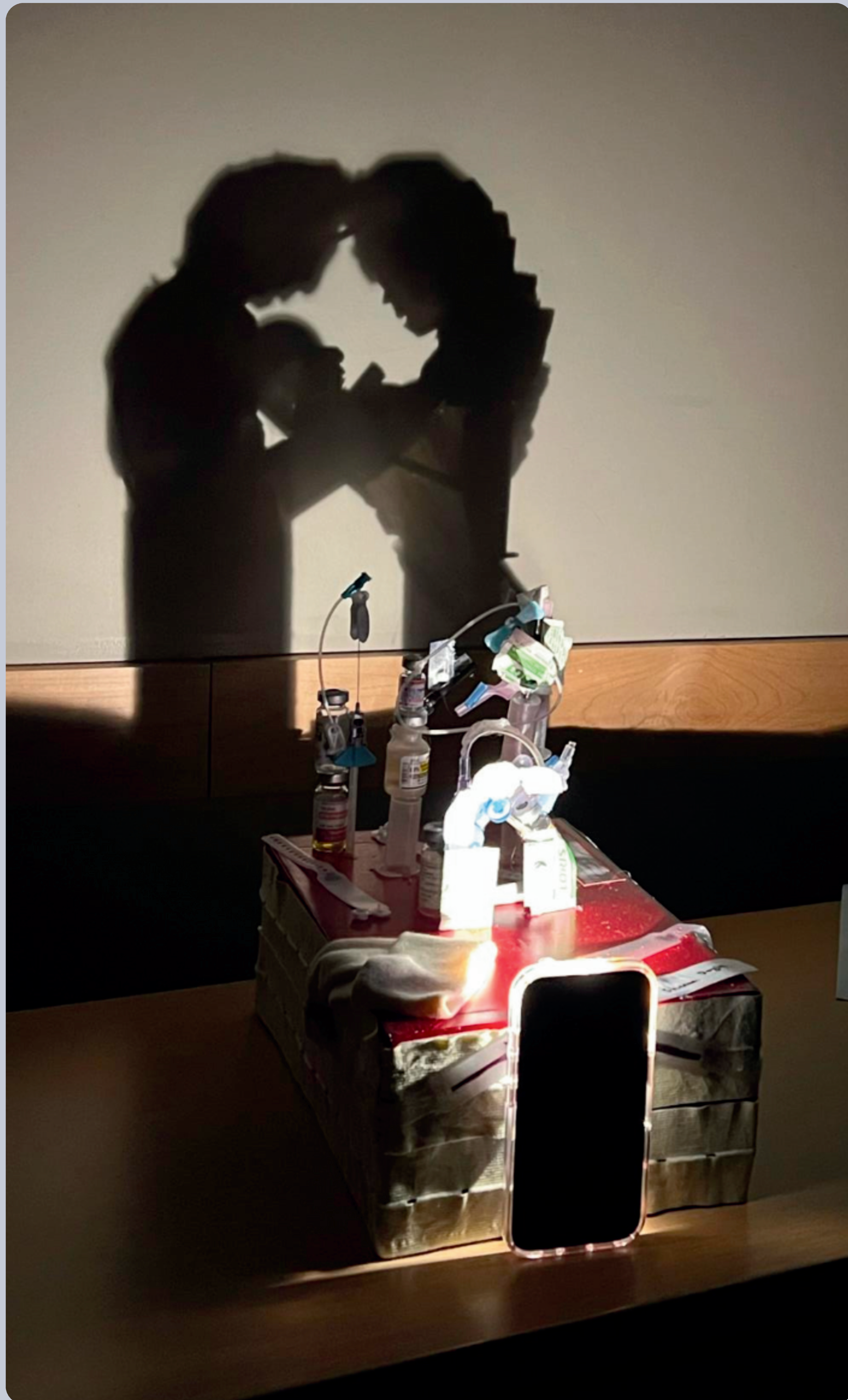


Sheena Doyle, MScN (Candidate), Ingram School of Nursing, McGill University



## Background & Rationale

Indigenous women and families in Canada have long endured **medical colonialism**, including forced and coerced sterilizations, systemic racism in obstetric care, and the erasure of Indigenous birthing knowledge (Basile & Bouchard, 2022; Shaheen-Hussain et al., 2023; Webb, 2023). Reports and testimonies show how these practices undermine free, prior, and informed consent, **reinforce systemic racism**, and contribute to medical colonialism which meets the **UN definition of genocide** (Shaheen-Hussain et al., 2023; Webb, 2023).

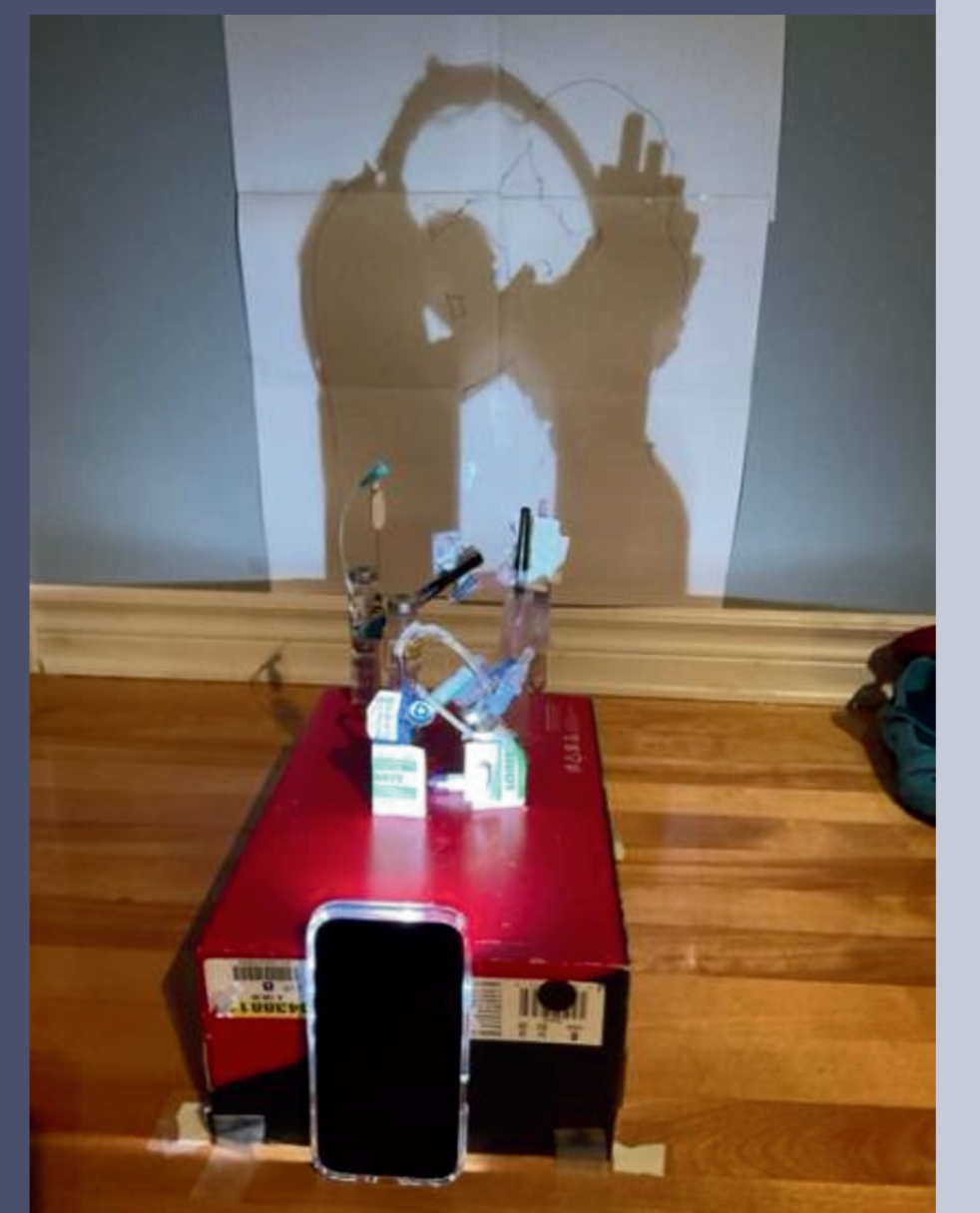
Nursing has been complicit in colonial harms—**Indian hospitals, residential schools, child apprehensions, forced sterilizations, and the erasure of Indigenous birthing practices** (Symenuk et al., 2020). This poster re-frames shadow art as a **critical reflection**, showing how colonial practices cast families into the shadows and calling for decolonial nursing to **illuminate truths** and support Indigenous sovereignty in health.

## Methods / Artistic Process

- **Medium:** Shadow art installation created using hospital objects (IV bags, needles, newborn hats, vials).
- **Technique:** A perpendicular light source projects the shadow of a family holding a newborn, each piece placed with critical reflection and trial and error.

### Symbolism:

- **Light:** Where we choose to shine attention.
- **Shadow:** Families, communities, and histories obscured by colonial healthcare.
- **Reclaimed space:** Reuse of medical items, critiques over-medicalization of birth and highlights sustainability.
- **Interpretive frame:** McGill's Strengths-Based Nursing and Healthcare (SBNH) model is re-situated alongside Indigenous relational and holistic knowledge traditions (Basile et al., 2023).



## Key Messages

- **Colonial Shadows:** Obstetric violence and coerced sterilization exemplify how Indigenous bodies and choices were controlled under medical colonialism (Basile & Bouchard, 2022; Webb, 2023).
- **Families Left in the Dark:** Healthcare efficiency models often neglect relational foundations of care, obscuring family strengths
- **Truth-Telling:** Nursing must confront its colonial legacy rather than placing the burden on Indigenous Peoples to educate (Symenuk et al., 2020).
- **Illumination as Decolonization:** Choosing where to shine the light means centering Indigenous knowledge, rights, and family autonomy in healthcare practice and policy.

“Art as a critical reflection on nursing colonialism, aiming to highlight Indigenous knowledge systems and health.” - Sheena Doyle



## Calls to Action

- Support communities **reclaiming birth through midwifery programs**, cultural ceremony, and asserting jurisdiction over maternal-child health #birthback (Basile et al., 2023).
- Enact and enforce laws explicitly **criminalizing forced/coerced sterilization** (Shaheen-Hussain et al., 2023).
- Uphold **Joyce's Principle**, ensuring Indigenous governance in healthcare systems (Conseil des Atikamekw de Manawan & Conseil de la Nation Atikamekw, 2020).
- **Train nurses and health professionals** in decolonial, strengths-based frameworks that **recognize Indigenous sovereignty and relational care** (Symenuk et al., 2020).

## References

- Basile, S., & Bouchard, P. (2022). *Free and informed consent and imposed sterilizations among First Nations and Inuit women in Quebec*. First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission. <https://sterilisationsimposes.ccsspnl.com/?lang=en>
- Basile, S., Comat, I., & Cornellier, F. (2023). *Access to midwifery services for Indigenous communities in Quebec*. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.24253.27362>
- Conseil des Atikamekw de Manawan, & Conseil de la Nation Atikamekw. (2020). *Joyce's Principle*. [https://principejoyce.com/sn\\_uploads/principe/Joyce\\_s\\_Principe\\_brief\\_Eng.pdf](https://principejoyce.com/sn_uploads/principe/Joyce_s_Principe_brief_Eng.pdf)
- Dawson, L., & Suntiens, T. (2022). "Only then will the buffalo return": Disrupting obstetric violence through Indigenous reproductive justice. In A. N. Castañeda, N. Hill, & J. J. Searcy (Eds.), *Obstetric violence: Realities and resistance from around the world* (pp. 227–242). Demeter Press.
- Shaheen-Hussain, S., Lombard, A., & Basile, S. (2023). Confronting medical colonialism and obstetric violence in Canada. *The Lancet*, 401(10388), 1763–1765. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(23\)01015-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)01015-9)
- Symenuk, P. M., Tisdale, D., Bourque Beauskin, D. H., & Munro, T. (2020). In search of the truth: Uncovering nursing's involvement in colonial harms and assimilative policies five years post Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *Witness: The Canadian Journal of Critical Nursing Discourse*, 2(1), 84–96. <https://doi.org/10.25071/2291-5796.51>
- Webb, D. (2023). *Forced and coerced sterilization of Indigenous women and girls in Canada: Understanding the practice and how to end it*. National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health. <https://www.nccih.ca/en/>